

# Duchesne County wants out of tar sand pit, but native asphalt works for Uintah

By Lezlee E. Whiting

Eight years ago it looked like a good investment, but today Duchesne County Commissioners are looking at what it would take to get out of a contract for partial ownership in a tar sand pit above Whiterocks. Tar sands are crushed to produce "native asphalt," which is being used by the county to pave new roads.

At the same time, Uintah County is experiencing extremely good results using native asphalt thanks to the use of a new process used by Ned B. Mitchell, Inc. an Altamont company they contract with for road paving.

To date, Duchesne County has spent over \$1.6 million for a 25 percent share of the property owned by Ester Fausett. The county still owes \$600,000 to pay off their debt, but last week county commissioners decided to write a letter to Fausett asking if she would consider buying back the county's share of the tar sand pit for \$250,000 - or let them out of their contract.

Recent core samples have determined that, while there are plenty of tar sand deposits still waiting to be claimed, they are buried too deep to make their recovery financially feasible for the county.

"The pit is narrowing down; most likely we could get three to four more years of asphalt out of that pit. But the cost being what it is, and because we have to haul it so far, we just feel it's not agreeable to do that anymore," said Duchesne County Commission Chairman Guy Thayne.

In addition, Thayne said the county hasn't experienced the road paving savings they anticipated when they agreed to purchase a 25 percent share in the pit in 1992. They are also discovering that native asphalt isn't holding up quite as well as "traditional asphalt" does on roadways, he said.

"Tar sand comes out in rock form, then you have to crush it. It's just a sand with the oil in it, and sand is always in motion. Sometimes it's rich in oil and sometimes it isn't. They try and mix it as they crush it to get a product that's somewhat consistent, but it's almost an impossible task," Thayne stated, adding that the main reason the county wants out of the contract is that the product is becoming more difficult to extract.

The county has crushed 270,000 tons of tar sands since 1992 and paved 109 miles of new roads. Some overlaying has been done during that time with traditional asphalt.

"There has been a lot of work done with native asphalt and there are

areas that have had to be redone. The native asphalt 'gives' and doesn't have that stability. It's ended up that it would have cost the same if we had laid regular asphalt down."

Duchesne County Deputy Attorney Roland Uresk is researching the county's legal obligations in the contract.

Meanwhile in Uintah County, commissioners are enjoying a considerable cost savings and many more miles of paved roads with the use of native asphalt, due to a new process used in producing the product.

Gil N. Mitchell, president of Mitchell, Inc. said the process patent for native asphalt was issued by the US Patent office earlier this month, but has been in use for the past two years. The newly invented mixing process makes tar sand extracted from Mitchell's pit west of Vernal

considerably more stable and durable.

Uintah County road crews went from paving 10 miles a year with the native asphalt to an average of 60 miles of road per year over the last two years.

The product is much more attractive financially than traditional asphalt, said Mitchell, and yields immediate pay backs.

"Uintah County's B road fund has more than doubled because of the new roads that have been paved," he stated.

State funding for B roads is based on a formula in which counties are reimbursed through state coffers for the miles of B roads they have. According to Mitchell, Uintah County's B road fund has gone from approximately \$1.8 million to \$4 million due to their increase in paved roads.



CITIZEN INPUT—During a town meeting, Roosevelt businessman Cannon said he expected interest rates would be cut in the future.

## Conservation initiative endorsed by Farm Bureau

Officials of Farm Bureau, Utah's largest farm, ranch and landowner organization, have endorsed in principle the conservation initiative announced earlier this week by Nature Conservancy for several areas of Utah.

The project plans to raise \$10 million to acquire easements, title

## Vandals m with red &

Sometime late Saturday night, April 22 or early Sunday morning, April 23, vandals tossed two buckets full of red and white paint over Union cougar mascot. The mascot sits in the school's north parking lot facing Highway 40. The crime was reported to police early Sunday morning.

Both of the cans of paint were at the scene, said Roosevelt Police Officer Shawn Denver. The enamel-based, industrial type paint sets in 30 minutes, but takes 24 hours to harden. The paint was probably chased from a paint dealer, he said.

The bronze cougar has a high-gloss finish to protect the bronze. Union High custodians and principal Lloyd Burton used a special chemical to wash off some of the paint a few hours after it was discovered, but much of it still remains, but now it's a pinkish color. A final work will be done to fix



ROTTEN ACT OF RIVALRY?—Union High custodians and principal Lloyd Burton spent several hours Sunday afternoon trying to clean up the school's mascot after red and white paint was thrown on the bronze statue. Although some of the paint was able to be removed, much of it remains.

UINTAH BASIN STANDARD  
APRIL 25, 2000 PAGE 11